

Lifted to Safety

Air Force helps thousands in wake of Hurricane Katrina

In late August 2005, in what some are calling “America’s Tsunami,” Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region along Louisiana and Mississippi’s borders. The storm’s aftermath will produce numbers most find difficult to comprehend — billions of dollars in damages, millions of individual lives affected, hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

But, these numbers have little meaning to the child pararescueman Tech. Sgt. Lem Torres (right) rescued Sept. 2 from the top of his flooded home.

That child and more than 4,500 others were snatched from life-threatening situations by Air Force search and rescue crews during the first week following landfall of one of the most powerful hurricanes to hit the United States in decades. Additionally, 8,000 Reserve, Guard and active duty Airmen delivered more than 9,000 tons of cargo and

flew over 20,000 passengers, including 2,500 patients. And, the Air Force’s 4th Air Expeditionary Group Medical Squadron treated more than 5,500 patients in a make-shift “field” hospital staged at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

But it’s not the numbers that tell this story. It’s the actions of individuals like Sergeant Torres, from Moody Air Force Base, Ga., that reflects the compassion of Airmen everywhere.

The following pictures portray a small number of the hundreds of stories Airmen were a part of during the early days of this catastrophe. ♡

opening photo by Staff Sgt. Manuel J. Martinez



by Photographer's Mate 1st Class (AW) Brian Aho



Mass evacuation

Aeromedical personnel from Scott Air Force Base, Ill., and Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, (right) work to evacuate patients from the New Orleans international airport. The Airmen set up a Mobile Aero-medical Staging Facility, working around-the-clock, to treat thousands of survivors. During the onset of the hurricane, Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. (below), took a major hit. The massive storm devastated the base and claimed the base's once vibrant training mission. More than 2,400 students and non-essential personnel were evacuated from the base.

courtesy photo



Looking for rest

Air Force search and rescue crews took to the skies, evacuating thousands from the New Orleans area (right). A large number of evacuees were taken to the international airport (bottom) for initial medical care. Airport terminals turned field hospitals were immediately established. While many sought medical attention, others reunited with family members. Just one week following Katrina, Airman Basic Tylar Pittman (below) from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, reunited with her father, Timothy. Mr. Pittman was left homeless after the storm and evacuated to San Antonio. Their emotional reunion was the first time the two had seen each other in three years.



by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung



by Master Sgt. Scott Reed

